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ABSTRACT

We live in an increasingly information-based society. A concomitant result of entry into this new era has been the accumulation, at an unprecedented rate, of the volume of information. This paper describes how the flood of information has impacted upon the academic library and how the library has responded to the continuing challenges of access. It also describes the library's efforts to ensure that students are able to understand and use the expanding range of access tools, from the print index to the computer-assisted catalog. A description of the State University of New York (SUNY) Brockport's latest bibliographic instruction course is provided as an example of such efforts. Finally, this paper re-states the meaning of information literacy, as defined by the American Library Association's Presidential Committee, in the context of the academic library and its student users. (6 references) (Author)

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INFORMATION LITERACY

AND THE LIBRARY

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by

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INFORMATION LITERACY AND THE LIBRARY

We live in an increasingly information-based society. Many refer to our era as the Information Age. Profound changes have occurred in the way we acquire, store and provide access to information. A concomitant result of entry into this new era has been the accumulation, at an unprecedented rate, of the volume of information. This paper describes how the flood of information has impacted upon the academic library and how the library has responded to the continuing challenges of access. It also describes the library's efforts to ensure that students are able to understand and use the expanding range of access tools, from the print index to the computer-assisted catalog. Finally, this paper re-states the meaning of information literacy, as defined by the American Library Association's Presidential Committee, in the context of the academic library and its student users.

But first, what does information literacy mean, when examined from the library perspective? According to a report issued by the American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989, p. 1): "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

The Presidential Committee further articulates the role and responsibility of the educational community in producing an information literate citizenry. The committee notes that: "Producing such a citizenry will require that schools and colleges appreciate and integrate the concept of information literacy into their learning programs and that they play a leadership role in equipping individuals and institutions to take advantage of the opportunities inherent within the information society."

What are the effects on the library of some of the developments brought on by our entry into the Information Age? Ignoring for a moment the substantial increase in costs both in personnel and in equipment, three of the most visible areas of impact are: 1) the tremendous growth in the body of information; 2) introduction of the computer to library processes and services; and 3) emergence of a range of new means of storing information, from the microform and video cassette to the sound recording and computer disk.

Perhaps, of greatest importance has been the unprecedented expansion in the production of information. To illustrate, in the past twenty-five years the annual output of new titles and new editions of books in the United States has nearly doubled. In 1965 the total was about 28,600 (Statistical Abstract of the U. S., 1970, p. 502). By 1987 the total nearly doubled to 56,000 items (Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1990, p. 227). In 1950 the figure was only about 11,000 new items (Statistical Abstract of the

U.S., 1970, p. 502). As substantial as these data are, they do not include the output of new government publications, books sold by subscription, and pamphlets.

More difficult to comprehend has been the tremendous expansion in the number of new periodical titles. In 1990 the number of U.S. and Canadian periodicals was about 70,000 titles (Standard Periodical Directory, 1990, Preface). In 1965 the total was about 20,000 titles. This represents a three-fold increase in titles in the past twenty-five years. To keep up with the flood of new periodicals, publishers have produced a broad range of abstracts and indexes. Bill Katz identifies over two-hundred basic indexes and abstracts, in his well known directory, Magazines for Libraries (1989, pp. 1-39). Of these sources he considers basic, forty percent did not exist twenty years ago.

Perhaps having greatest impact on the library has been the introduction of the computer. Off to a hesitant start in the 1960's and 70's, the computer has become an essential component in both the technical division and the public service sector of the library. With the introduction of computer-assisted online catalogs, the venerable old card catalog is becoming a part of library history. Coupled with the expansion in the number of indexes was the introduction of online, computer database searching, now a staple of library service. Online searching -- as relatively short as its history has been -- is rapidly being replaced by the compact-disk, read-only-memory (CD-ROM) computer database

systems. At larger institutions, this latest technology is facing increasing competition from indexing systems supported by campus main-frame computers. Microforms, from the microfilm to the microfiche, have become a most practical means of recording data. Microforms and other media are not merely providing new ways of preserving information. They are providing a practical means of recording data formerly unavailable to the library in paper format. One example is the popular Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) microfiche collection of more than 320,000 documents. Twenty-five years ago ERIC was in its infancy.

How do college students deal with these developments in the academic library? From this seemingly limitless array of sources and indexes, how do they determine what is most useful and appropriate to meet their information needs? To become information literate, they must first become confident and effective users.

In addition to mastering a range of new skills, they must become informed of the principles that guide the classification and arrangement of data in order to locate it. They must become conversant with such concepts as key-word indexing, free-text searching, and Boolean logic. It is sad but true, but many students come to college little prepared to deal with the scope and level of sophistication of today's academic library. They may or may not be familiar with the most common of sources, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature.

They will be unprepared to conduct even the most basic search for information to clarify a concept presented in class, or complete a written assignment.

Of great concern is how college students currently perceive and use their library. According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, National Survey of Undergraduates (1987, p. 160):

"Today, about one out of every four undergraduates spends no time in the library during a normal week, and 65 percent use the library four hours or less each week. Nearly one quarter reported spending just one to two hours there each week. This means that about half of all the undergraduate students spend no more than two hours in the library every week."

Concerning their views of the library, the surveyors found that most undergraduates viewed the library as a convenient and quiet place to go to study. According to their findings (1987, p. 161):

"Over half of the students never use the library to consult specialized bibliographies or to read a basic document referred to by an author. About 40 percent use the library to 'run down leads' or to look for further reference."

As the lack of use buy students is a matter of concern, so also is the method of instruction. According to the Carnegie Study, "Textbooks dominate the teaching and only occasionally was the library mentioned, and then in the context of a special reading that was on reserve" (1987, p. 163).

While knowing about, and how to use, the tools of access

students who are information literate must first be able to recognize when information is needed. They do not accept all that is presented to them at face value. They question and evaluate ideas. They make judgements. They accept challenges to their beliefs, but through critical examination and comparison they arrive at their own conclusions. They recognize the need for information to support and clarify questions or issues that arise in their course-related readings and writing assignments. They recognize when their information needs exceed or are different from the resources within their own library. They understand that their own library serves them as the link or gateway to the broadest community of libraries and library holdings.

Information literate students are confident in their ability to identify and locate needed information. They are familiar with the library, its services, and resources. They understand the structure and arrangement of databases, whether in paper or electronic format. They understand the principles and procedures necessary to access the computer-online catalog and the CD-ROM workstation. They can articulate research questions and identify major variables as required for successful computer-online bibliographic database searching.

Students who are information literate are able to evaluate information. They can readily distinguish between opinion and the results of more scientifically arrived-at conclusions. They can distinguish between the scholarly or

professional journal and a popular magazine. They are able to find evidence from varying viewpoints and perspectives. They are aware of biased or prejudiced viewpoints and interpretations. They can identify and locate reviews and critiques of literary, scholarly, and artistic presentations and publications.

Information literate students can use effectively needed information. They recognize and give credit to the thoughts and contributions of others. They understand the application of bibliographic style to correctly recognize and incorporate the thoughts and ideas of others, to lend support and credence to their own arguments and hypotheses.

Students are able to bring together, after making comparisons and evaluating, various findings or interpretations to produce their own perspective and analysis, incorporating the contributions of others. Most importantly, information literate students become information literate citizens, possessing both skill and knowledge in the search for and use of information throughout their lives.

Through their college experience they are prepared to find challenging positions of responsibility and professional growth in a world of work increasingly information centered and dependent.

In their personal lives, they will be informed consumers, fully aware of their rights and obligations. They will be fully informed of the issues and policies of government that effect them personally and as members of

their community. As informed citizens they will seek to contribute their views and their assistance by serving in community positions of leadership and trust.

In their chosen field of work, they will know how to obtain, evaluate, and use information effectively. They will keep informed of job standards, rules and regulations, as well as changing methods and procedures that effect them and their organizations. They will be able to up-grade their knowledge and skills, as their job requirements change. And finally, with the uncertainties of technological advancement, organizational restructuring, and shifts in the economy, they will be more able to adjust to change, find new or different career paths or employment opportunities.

The academic library has been very much involved in preparing students to become information literate. At the State University College at Brockport, librarians have had substantial experience and success in library-use instruction. In addition to providing a wide range of print sources from instruction booklets and bibliographic guides, they offer a popular course-related instruction program, and a comprehensive orientation-instruction program using videotapes, audio cassettes, and library-skills workbooks. The comprehensive instruction program has been in use for the past ten years. It has been provided as a module of the basic communications course, COM 111. At present, the library's Bibliographic Instruction Committee is developing a new program which will become a component of the Academic

Planning Seminar (APS). It will be offered in two segments: Segment 1, providing students with an orientation to the library, is offered by means of portable audio-tape players and headsets. Students come to the library in class units, taking a library tour together with their instructor. Segment 2 consists of a library-skills workbook which students complete with help and guidance from the librarians. Segment 2 provides exercises in the use of selected indexes, major reference works, and the computer-assisted online (DYNIX) catalog.

This program is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of the library, its collections, and its services. It is designed to reach the maximum number of students, while requiring a minimum of actual participation time by librarians. The course-related instruction program is designed for more advanced students needing an introduction to, and instruction in the use of, a wide range of more specialized research tools. Instructors call to set up appointments. Information is obtained concerning the subject emphasis or research problem. A librarian is then assigned to conduct the class or workshop.

A number of years ago the library offered an upper-division, credit-bearing course. Reductions in the size of the library faculty precluded continuation of the course as well as significantly limiting librarians' actual participation time in the comprehensive freshman instruction program.

Librarians have met the challenge, doing so with insufficient help. Perhaps, more troubling than the need for additional staff has been the indifference of some campus colleagues concerning students' need to become confident, informed, and successful gatherers and users of information. With the development of a broad-range of reference resources, computer-assisted bibliographic data-bases, and unique research collections, new searching techniques and concepts, there is a legitimate need for instruction in finding and using information. And librarians are uniquely qualified to provide the instruction. But the responsibility is not theirs alone.

The Presidential Committee on Information Literacy calls for a new spirit of cooperation between the librarian and the classroom teacher. Both must share in the effort to guide and prepare students to become information literate. It will take their combined knowledge and effort to: "Involve students in the process of knowing when they have a need for information, identifying information needed to address a given problem or issue, finding needed information, evaluating the information, organizing the information, using the information effectively to address the problems or issues at hand. Such a restructuring of the learning process will not only enhance the critical thinking skills of students, but will also empower them for lifelong learning and the effective performance of professional and civic responsibilities" (1989, p. 7.)

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